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An Address by Bayard Rustin

THE ANATOMY OF FRUSTRATION



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The Anatomy of Frustration

An address delivered by

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of B'nai B'rith.

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The United States is in a crisis, a deep moral crisis—and I speak with a heavy heart.

Many younger Negroes today, in deep frustration, sincerely, gropingly, tragically, have adopted many of the negative and degrading concepts which have brutalized and enslaved them, believing somehow that these concepts can achieve freedom for them.

We must try to analyze the problem.

We would be mistaken to think that the only desire of young Negroes today is to have a job, to have a decent house, to be well-educated, to have medical care. All of these things are very important, but deeper and more profound is the feeling of young Negroes today—through all classes, from the *lumpenproletariat* to the working poor, the working classes, the middle classes and the intelligentsia—that the time has come when they are demanding recognition of their dignity and that the time has come when they should have power, a voice in the solution of problems which affect their lives. Every Negro in the nation could be provided with decent housing, jobs, education, medical care, and we would still have a revolt on our hands because Negroes want, deeply and sincerely, to share in the decision-making process.

The tragedy is that those who are in deepest revolt are not only responding to the frustrations of their objective situation, but more fundamentally to the morality of a society which is teaching them that violence is the only effective force for social change. This society is systematically teaching them that it will respond only to tactics of desperation and violence.

This is not only true for Negroes. Many of

us have been concerned for years about Columbia University taking all the land around its Harlem site and running people out of their homes to build high-rise structures exclusively for white people. We warned Columbia officials that a problem would occur. But the great educators at Columbia did not respond to our pleas. They waited until 200 students, using the tactics of desperation, closed down the University. Then they were ready to talk. Then they were ready to discuss whether there ought to be a building where Columbia students, predominantly white, would enter from the top into one gym and where Negroes from Harlem would enter at the bottom of the same structure into a separate gym. One should have known that such separated facilities would create problems.

Or, let us take another example. In Chicago, young Negroes went out into the street because they had no air conditioning, because their apartments had three and four times too many people. They could endure it in the winter but in the summer they could not. And so the kids went out and turned on the fire hydrants and the police came and beat their heads and there was a riot. And then came the tragic lesson that violence is indeed a force for social change: The Mayor of Chicago, failing to meet the basic social and political needs of the people, responded by riding through the ghetto distributing eight dollar sprinklers for the fire hydrants. In addition, he promised them two swimming pools.

Or, in New York where A. Philip Randolph and I had for five years tried to get the police department to upgrade Negro patrolmen: We urged that a Negro be made head of the police

force in Harlem for psychological reasons. It was not done. But two weeks after the riot in 1964, they upgraded a Negro lieutenant, made him a captain, and put him in charge of the Central Harlem Precinct. I then received a letter from a youth group saying, "You and Randolph failed. You should roll over and get the hell out of the way for your methods don't work. *We* upgraded a Negro policeman with sticks and stones and Molotov cocktails."

So this is the lesson we are teaching—that when the liberal forces of this nation join in coalition and urge that something be done, they are ignored. But that when people riot something is done. While basic needs are not met, minor and often insignificant concessions are made.

Negro women in Watts making \$55 and \$60 a week as maids were spending up to twenty-six of those dollars getting taxis from the Negro ghetto to the white homes where they worked because no one had provided a transportation system for Watts. When Martin Luther King and I went to Watts and told the young Negroes they must put an end to rioting, that it was destroying their own community, they said: "Go back where you came from. We are winning." One of them lit a match, held it up, and said: "This is our manifesto and it's winning." And he went on to say that if you went out into the streets you would find sociologists, economists, city planners, hospital experts, transportation experts, "all there because of our manifesto." The fact is that there were groups in Watts before that riot which had urged the city to do something about conditions. They were ignored.

The action for dealing with the problem of



justice must come quickly, and before more rioting, lest we further teach people that the only viable method of social change is an act of desperation.

What I know, and what you ought to know, is the tragedy of a society which will not make basic changes but will make promises and token concessions—so long as the rioting goes to point X. But when it reaches X plus one, we are all in trouble, for then there will be the most vigorous repression. Then there will be vigilantism. Even more important, you cannot repress one-tenth of the population, no matter how badly elements of it behave, without threatening the civil liberties of everyone in the nation. Where there are not civil liberties, we cannot make social progress. That I believe is the problem before us.

What must be understood is the anatomy of frustration, and here is where the Jewish problem can be put into focus. I am not one who goes about apologizing for or explaining away Negro anti-Semitism. It is here, it is dangerous, it must be rooted out. We cannot say it is somehow different or not really important. We cannot sweep it under the rug. What we can and had better do is to understand it if we are in fact to deal with it.

The first thing about those who are frustrated is that their frustration causes them to adopt a psychology, an economics, and a sociology which are frustrated. It goes like this: The United States is no longer viable. All institutions must be destroyed and new ones established. Negroes are never going to get their rights.

The death of Dr. Martin Luther King spurred that philosophy to its logical conclusion. Take

what Stokely Carmichael is reported to have said: "If they wanted to brutalize a black man, why didn't they get me or Rap Brown. We're the really dangerous ones to this social order. The fact that they got King indicates that Negroes will never get anything in this society and they are out to exterminate us all."

So the first point of the frustrated is that the society is not viable. Secondly, if the society is not viable, then no program needs to be projected because to project a program is to fool the masses of Negroes. So they viciously attack the Freedom Budget put forth by A. Philip Randolph. To them Randolph and I became the major enemies because we were putting forth a program, and to put forth a program, when you know nothing will move, is dishonest.

Thirdly, if the nation is not viable, and no program is needed, then all those people who have worked over the years for civil rights and are still working for integration into this society become the enemy. Not the Ku Klux Klan, not the John Birch Society, but those closest to you.

This is what Jews need to understand: That in the list of whom you attack, those you love come first. You attack those you expected something from. You attack those who have in fact carried the banner. So before King's death, King and his non-violence were the first enemy precisely because he had done the most. The argument went that if after all the bloodshed, the bombings, the tear-gassing, the water-hosing and the dogs, King could not produce real victories, then he had fooled his people, he had exposed them to useless sacri-

fice. After his death, of course, a new situation was created. Now they had the opportunity to shift gears, to say that the greatest Negro was killed by a white. But when King was alive, it was a different story.

Next in the list of enemies of the frustrated come Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, A. Philip Randolph. They are now the traitors to the cause. I have leaflets in my office in which A. Philip Randolph is threatened. One, with blobs of red paint looking like blood, declares: "Randolph, you are next."

Listed, too, are the liberal community which has fought side by side with us and the Jews who made greater contributions than anybody else in the liberal community. Because of this reverse hate-affection syndrome, Martin Luther King, Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, A. Philip Randolph, the liberals, the Jews, the labor leaders who lifted almost two million Negroes out of the *lumpenproletariat* into the working classes, are all bastards now.

The point is that if Jews are under attack by the extreme left in the Negro community, they are in the same basket with Negro leaders and even the most progressive political leadership. Jews are not the only victims of this attack. Jews are not likely to feel better simply because others are also under attack, nevertheless there ought to be an understanding of what the problem really is.

In the anatomy of frustration, the long-time leadership is rejected. But heroes must be found somewhere and so they adopt heroes of foreign revolutions—not because they believe in the philosophy of their heroes, but because they want to adopt the extreme tactics that they believe have worked for those

heroes. Thus, Che Guevara, Mao Tse Tung, Castro and Fanon become heroes. This doesn't make the militants Communists. It means, rather, that they are so desperate for new methods that they reach into completely different kinds of situations hoping that those tactics can be applied here. Of course, they cannot be.

The tactics of the frustrated, or the anatomy of frustration, are that the only thing left to do, since the society is not viable and program is unrealistic, is to give everybody hell, to denounce everybody and to call for revolt.

Consider the question of the Jew in the ghetto. Nothing that I say is justification for anti-Semitism for I know that in a situation where anti-Semitism exists, none of us is safe. Anti-Semitism must be rooted out. We have, however, an obligation to try to understand Negro anti-Semitism without excusing it.

If you happen to be an uneducated, poorly trained Negro living in the ghetto, and particularly if you live by your wits selling numbers, selling dope, engaging in prostitution, then you only see four kinds of white people. One is the policeman, the second is the businessman, the third is the teacher, and the fourth is the welfare worker. In many cities, three of those four are predominantly Jewish. Except for the policeman, the majority of the businessmen, the majority of the teachers, the majority of the welfare workers are Jewish. Here again is the hate-love syndrome.

Ninety percent of the crime that Negroes commit is against other Negroes in the ghetto. Negroes, therefore, both hate and depend on policemen. To have to depend on someone you dislike and who often brutalizes you is ghastly.



Then comes the businessman. Many ghetto Negroes know nothing about capitalization. The fact is, if you walk up 125th Street you will see what they say you will see—a television set that sells in department stores for \$79.50 costs \$132 in Harlem. But the ghetto dweller does not calculate that the department store is able to sell the TV set at \$79.50 because he has made a considerable down payment, and is required to finish payments within one year; while in the ghetto he is often given, with no down payment, three or four years in which to pay. He often does not understand that as the length of time for payment is increased, the interest is increased. He does not always understand that only such long-term capitalization makes it possible for him to have a TV set at all.

Many people are kept alive for three and four weeks at a time by local businessmen who let them pile up the debt until they hit the numbers or something and can pay for what they bought. But if you hit the numbers once in a year and have to give most of the money to the groceryman for things you have already eaten, when there are still more things you need, you hate him for taking your money even though you know it belongs to him.

The thing to understand is that the chief characteristic of every ghetto and of every major poor area is that people operate on the principle of immediate gratification. If you have little money, you operate on immediate gratification. You don't buy a sheet until the sheet is torn. You don't buy salt until you're at dinner and the salt runs out. Nobody can save up enough money to take advantage of a sale. You've got to get it when you can—and

the tragedy here is that the need to live always on the principle of immediate gratification can be sometimes frightening.

A young fellow I got a job for came to see me a week after receiving his first two weeks pay. He came to thank me for the job and to show me what he had bought for himself. He had gone into a store on 125th Street when he had \$125 for his two weeks' work and had paid \$67.50 for a pair of alligator shoes.

Now, this may shock you, but if you have never had anything but sneakers, and even those with holes in them, and day after day you've been walking past the shoe store seeing something beautiful, then to pay that amount for it may be uneconomical but it is psychologically understandable. He held those shoes to his breast waiting for me to rave about how beautiful they were. And I did. I knew that at a later time I would have to talk to him about the wise use of money, but I wasn't going to destroy his moment of immediate gratification, which was for him a moment of great beauty.

Next comes the teacher. She's Jewish. In the ghetto one does not analyze that the Board of Education and the whole system is corrupt, that no matter how much that teacher wants to teach she cannot teach in those conditions. One does not bother to analyze that it is not the teacher's fault that the child had no breakfast, and may not have lunch, that he may have to go to the poolroom to bum money for potato chips and an orange soda and that that may be all he eats that day. How can you teach that child? How can you teach children when you have forty in a class and two disruptive children who need psychiatric care? To

the ghetto mother, there is the teacher and she is Jewish. And she doesn't think the Jewish teacher cares whether her child gets to learn or not.

Then you come to the welfare worker. If you know anything about welfare you know that spying is part of the system. To sneak around on weekends to find out if there are men's shoes or pants hanging in the closets, whether a man has been in the house for the weekend, is part of the job. One method by which the relief rolls are decreased is on the basis of finding a man in the house.

We must get at these problems not on the basis of urging people merely to change their attitudes or of misinterpreting the Kerner Report on civil disorders. That report didn't say that Americans are racist. If it did, the only answer would be to line everybody up, all 200 million of us, line up 200,000 psychiatrists, and we'd all lie on couches for the first ten years trying to understand the problem and the next ten years learning how to deal with it. All over the country people are beating their breasts crying *mea culpa*—"I'm so sorry that I am a racist"—which means, really, that they want to cop out because if racism is to be solved on an individual psychological basis, then there is little hope.

What the Kerner Report was really saying was that the *institutions* of America brutalize not only the Negro but also whites who are not racists, and who in many communities have to use racist institutions. When it's put on that basis, we know that the fundamental problem is not sitting around examining our innards, but getting out and fighting for institutional change.

I am all in favor of Jewish businessmen doing what they can to find a job here and there for the Negro. That's very commendable. But if the choice were between putting energy into finding a job here or there for a Negro as against putting the weight of the affluent Jewish businessman behind fundamental social change in which the government becomes the employer of first and last resort for the hardcore poor, then I would propose the latter choice. The problem is that neither individuals nor the private sector of the economy has, or can take, the responsibility for full employment in American society. This is the responsibility of all segments of the society and thus, finally, the government.

The Negro and the poor can only be lifted out of poverty when the government takes the responsibility for creating work for those that the private sector can no longer use, given the impact of automation and cybernation. American business will not buy sheer muscle power. The sale of muscle power began to diminish when sweatshops began to disappear. American capital is not going to put the under-educated back to work; the society must collectively do that. I am all for private enterprise doing what it can, but there are extreme limitations.

For example, we need a national land-use policy. We're not going to find homes for the poor until we have a national land-use policy, as well as a national migration policy. There is all the talk about urban crisis while in Mississippi and Georgia and Alabama, Negroes are being run off the farms and being forced into Chicago, St. Louis and New York. We will never catch up so long as the present farm



policy continues to drive them into the cities. The more of them that we find homes for, the more come in. One-half million Negroes are leaving the South annually, coming to New York, Chicago and other ghettos—one-half million coming in while only about 30,000 per year are going out of the ghettos into the suburbs. For those who don't take the trouble to find out, that is how the ghettos grow larger, with more frustration and more despair.

Here are some of the things we are going to have to do in order to deal with white fear and Negro frustration. We're going to have to have a \$2 minimum wage in this country. And if there are small businessmen frightened by that, let me reassure them that I am for government subsidization of those who cannot afford to pay just as the government subsidizes millionaire railway men and millionaire farmers with price supports. Why not the small businessman if he can't afford to pay?

We are going to have to have public works to put these people back to work and to do it without a lot of talk about pre-training. These people don't have to be pre-trained. All they need to know is that there is a job. John Dewey said that a man learns by doing. I want to go Dewey one better—we must put these people to work learning while doing, and while being paid. In World War II we did not ask whether people were too black, or too old, or too young, or too stupid. We simply said to them this is a hammer, this is a tool, this is a drill. We built factories and sent these people into the factories. We paid them extraordinarily good wages and in two months they created the miracle of making planes that flew. We can find a peacetime method for

doing this. And the method is in public works—for all the schools, all the hospitals, all the psychiatric clinics, all the new modes of transportation, of cleaning the air, of cleaning the rivers. All of these improvements would benefit not only the poor but also the affluent. Furthermore, for those who cannot work because they are too young, too old, too sick, or who are female heads of large families, we must have guaranteed incomes. In addition, we must have free medical care and we must pay a salary to those capable of going through school. Beyond this we must see that the ghettos with their high density of people per room cannot be improved. We must create new towns and destroy the ghettos, providing work through construction and human services to humans. Nothing short of this will be effective.

These programs will cost us \$18.5 billion a year beyond the present level of expenditure and that money can come from the Gross National Product. But I want to assure businessmen again—these people are not going to sit on the money when they get it. They're going to act like Americans. They're going to go out and buy all the junk that is advertised, thereby raising the GNP, raising the economic production and growth of the country, and fundamentally adding to the economic stability of the nation.

The way things are now, we are twice damned. We are paying \$15 billion a year for the support and misdeeds of those who cannot find work and end up in prison or on welfare. If they are provided with work and improve the economy, then we have additional growth plus the \$15 billion we are now paying

for keeping them on welfare and in jail.

For the things which must be done, I request the understanding, the cooperation and the aid of Jews. I do so knowing that there is Negro anti-Semitism and knowing how Jews must feel when they hear some Negro extremists talk. To hear these young Negroes spouting material directly from *Mein Kampf* must bring up terrible memories, shocking inner turmoil. But in times of confusion, I recommend to Jews what I do for myself in times of confusion. I go back and read the Jewish prophets, fundamentally Isaiah and Jeremiah. And I want you to know that if every Jew in the United States—not just a minority of extremists—called me a black nigger and said we don't need you to speak out against anti-Semitism in Poland, we can handle it ourselves, I would not stop speaking out against anti-Semitism in Poland. I would continue to speak because I could do no other, because Isaiah and Jeremiah have taught me to be against injustice wherever it is, and first of all in myself. There is a moral problem in abandoning the fight against injustice merely because less than two percent of the Negroes in this country are engaging in anti-Semitism. It is a problem which Isaiah and Jeremiah would be the first to point out and it may even be a cop out for those Jews who have other reasons for wanting to abandon the struggle. I urge Jews to be aware of that and at the same time to remember that the issue never was, and never can be, simply a problem of Jew and gentile or black and white. The problem is man's inhumanity to man and must be fought from that basic principle regardless of race or creed.

Jews ought not to fall into a trap. They have The Book. They've had the books. There is no more stirring story anywhere in the world, no more important philosophy in history, than can be found in Judaism. Everything is there, but it must be read. It must be remembered, too, that there were problems at the turn of the century when German Jews living in New York were distressed when Eastern Jews began to come in in large numbers. The term Eastern *Yidden* was used by those German Jews as if it meant nigger. Jews must remember their past history when they consider the militance and anti-Semitism among some young Negroes today. We must get on with the fight for a coalition of labor forces, of religious forces, of businessmen, of liberal and civil rights groups standing together. White fear, Negro frustration, and anti-Semitism will disappear not because we rail against them but because we bring about a social and economic program to neutralize them.

What is truly at stake is whether we can band together in a great political movement beyond party to bring about the socialization of this nation where it needs to be socialized, or whether we are going to permit the nation which we love to be torn asunder in a race war in which people who don't want to be on either side may be forced to take sides. That is our problem. That is our challenge. And I hope that the Jewish people, who have been among the staunchest liberal forces in this society, will continue to be a part of the coalition of forces necessary to meet this challenge.

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